DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 180 606 PS 011 083

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TITLE Assessing Preferences of Kindergarten Parents and Staff Toward Behavioral and Cognitively Oriented Kindergarten Methods.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Administrator Attitudes; Behavioral Objectives; Cognitive Objectives; *Kindergarten; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; Teacher Aides; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was designed to determine the preferences of parents and school staff regarding behavioristic and cognitively oriented teaching methods. Sixteen goals appropriate for kindergarten programs were selected from descriptions of model early childhood programs. The goals reflected four categories: social, personal, intellectual and physical. Data was collected from parents of kindergarten children, kindergarten teachers and building principals in 14 elementary schools. Results indicate that both groups favored cognitively oriented methods. Further, the parents, while favoring cognitively oriented methods, were found to prefer more teacher-directed, behavioral instructional procedures in the social and intellectual areas of the kindergarten program. It is concluded that parents who are asked to assist with and support kindergarten programs may encounter difficulties if they themselves favor more directed, behavioral instructional methods. The questionnaire method can be used by schools to obtain useful information from both parents and staff. (Author/RH)

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ASSESSING PREFERENCES OF KINDERGARTEN PARENTS AND STAFF TOWARD BEHAVIORAL AND COGNITIVELY ORIENTED KINDERGARTEN METHODS

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PS011083

Descriptors: Kindergarten, Early Childhood, Parental Attitudes, Instructional Methods

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Results of comparisons between different Headstart and Follow Through programs indicate that programs based on behavioral and cognitive-transactionist theories have been successful in attaining their desired outcomes (Bissell, 1973; Weikart et al, 1978). Behavioral programs, such as those patterned after the University of Oregon model, have attempted to alleviate learning deficiencies through the use of direct instructional techniques designed to provide children with skills and information necessary for later academic success. Cognitively oriented programs, based on cognitive-transactionist theory, have attempted to develop the child's cognitive processes and intellectual abilities. While behavioral programs have been characterized by the use of direct instructional techniques and reinforcement in shaping learner behavior, cognitively oriented programs have been characterized by classrooms in which discovery learning and learning centers stimulate the child's interest and desire to learn (Stevens and King, 1976).

Many schools have been trying to involve parents in their child's educational planning and teaching. The impact of the parents on the child's educational success is greater than the influence of the school (Datta, 1975) and the schools are becoming more aware of the importance of parents in the educational process. If children are to reach their greatest level of

achievement the schools and parents must work together and cooperate as they provide quality experiences (Gordon, 1972).

A lack of understanding between attitudes of parents and school staff concerning appropriate teaching methods can interfere with the development of a positive relationship between the home and school. Both the home and school will experience difficulty providing their important functions without the support and understanding of one another (Leeper et al, 1974).

As a result of a need to assess the attitudes of parents and school staff concerning kindergarten methods a questionnaire was designed to determine the preferences of both groups regarding behavioristic and cognitively oriented teaching methods (Van Cleaf, 1979). Sixteen goals appropriate for kindergarten programs were selected from descriptions of model early childhood programs. The sixteen goals reflected four comprehensive categories including: social, personal, intellectual and physical. Each of the goals was presented in the form of a stem sentence and followed by four responses for meeting each goal. Two of the four responses were respresntative of behavioristic methods and two were representative of cognitively oriented methods. The completed questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of judges with each member rating the appropriateness of the responses. Responses to each goal statement were balanced, based on the judges ratings, to insure that statements were representative and of relatively equal value.

The preferences of the individuals and groups were determined by counting the number of behavioral responses selected. A score of sixteen was the greatest possible behavioral score while a score of zero (obtained by selecting only cognitively oriented items) was the greatest possible cognitive total. A score of eight was considered neutral as an even number of behavioral and cognitive responses were selected. The mean score for each of the groups was computed and a t-test was used to determine the significance of the differences.

Data was collected from parents of kindergarten pupils, kindergarten teachers and building principals in fourteen elementary schools. The schools were located in a midwestern city with a population of approximately 200,000. Each school was selected on the basis of the socioeconomic level of the building's attendance area. The questionnaire was distributed to the sample in September, 1978 in order to minimize the effects of home-school contacts. Seventy-one percent of the questionnaires were returned.

The direction of the mean scores of the parent group (N=233, $\bar{x}$=4.32) and the kindergarten teachers and principals (N=33, $\bar{x}$=2.42) indicated that both groups favored cognitively oriented methods. However, while both groups favored cognitively oriented methods, the mean scores of the two groups were significantly different ($p < .001$) in the degree to which they favored the methods (See Table 1). The discrepancy resulted from preferencial differences in the areas of intellectual and social goals (See Table 2). Parents, while favoring cognitively oriented methods, were

found to prefer more teacher-directed, behavioral instructional procedures in the social and intellectual areas of the kindergarten program.

Table 1

A COMPARISION OF BEHAVIORAL SCORES OF PARENTS AND KINDERGARTEN STAFF

Factors	Parents	Staff
Number of respondents	233	33
Mean behavioral scores	4.32	2.42

*$t = -3.98$, df = 234, $p < 0.0001$

Table 2

A COMPARISON OF BEHAVIORAL SCORES OF (1) PARENTS AND (2) KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS BY FOUR CATEGORIES OF KINDERGARTEN GOALS

Variable	t Value	Degrees of Freedom	2-Tail Probabilty
Intellectual goals	-5.14	264	0.0001
Personal goals	-1.47	264	0.14
Social goals	-3.32	264	0.001
Health/physical goals	-0.72	264	0.47

Significant differences were found to exist between the methods preferred by parents and those preferred by the kindergarten staff. These differences seem to appear in two areas, methods for conveying social and intellectual information, with parents indicating a desire for more teacher-directed methods. As schools attempt to involve parents in the educational planning and instruction they will need to understand the nature of these attitudinal differences. Parents asked to assist with and support kindergarten programs may encounter difficulties if they themselves favor more directed, behavioral instructional methods. The use of a questionnaire such as the one described in this paper can provide useful information for the schools. Schools can assess and compare the preferences of parents and the staff, and develop appropriate inservice activities to reduce attitudinal differences.

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